

# Consumer Council News

May 24, 2005

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## Peer Training

**Lisa Goodale, LSW, Peer Services Director of Peer to Peer Resource Center collaborated with VISN 17 South, Central, and North Texas VA facilities to offer Peer Recovery Specialist Training in Waco, Texas. Thirty consumers, most of them veterans took part in a five day training designed to provide knowledge of recovery and strengthen peer support skills. The goal is to promote employment and place trained participants in jobs or volunteer roles.**

Newsletter sponsored by  
VA Mental Health  
Consumer Council  
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## Enhancing the Mental Health of Post-Deployment Veterans

VISN 6 Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) is establishing a translational medicine center targeting clinical assessment and treatment of post-deployment mental illness, with an emphasis on early detection and prevention. Womack Medical Center is a full and active a collaboration that will allow the M to follow combat veterans and the into the VA system.

Harold Kudler, MD is directing the the Clinical Practice Guidelines (C management of posttraumatic stress MIRECC is collaborating with area bases and veteran organizations to tate outreach efforts. The outreach to meet the needs of men and women soldiers at the point when they are separating from the service. The research will utilize state-of-the-art genetic, neurocognitive, and

neuroimaging assessments to identify characteristics that differentiate individuals who develop post-deployment mental illnesses from those who do not.

An education component will assure that the latest knowledge in the field is made available to healthcare personnel to patients, families, and commanders. The pilot project is being d at Salisbury and will use medi- cations to design techniques to basic and clinical science into educational materials.



## Housing Priority for NAMI

The NAMI board recently placed *permanent supportive housing* into their Strategic Plan. A growing body of research indicates that permanent supportive housing is most effective in meeting the long-term housing needs of people with severe mental illnesses. Supportive housing is defined as available to an individual who has a mental illness; is homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless; and faces numerous barriers to employment and housing stability. The key factors for supportive housing are:

- \* It is permanent: It is critically important that housing is permanent and not transitional. This stresses that it is not subject to an arbitrary time limit. A lease or similar form of occupancy agreement should be in place to ensure tenancy as long as

the conditions of the lease or agreement are met.

- \* It provides access to supports: Consumers living in permanent supportive housing must have access to a flexible array of comprehensive services such as mental health, vocational, life skills etc.
- \* It allows for effective communication: There is ongoing communication between supportive service providers, property owners and housing subsidy programs.

The focus is on meeting the needs of individual consumers over time.

Online Newsletter  
[www.mentalhealth.med.va.gov/cc](http://www.mentalhealth.med.va.gov/cc)

## VA Nursing Homes as Neighborhoods

Christa Hoja, Chief, VA Nursing Home and Subacute Care is trying to transform the culture of VA Nursing Home Care. This past spring there was a nursing home summit to examine and formulate plans for transforming the delivery of care in VA Nursing Homes.

At the core of the transformation is the challenge to move away from the traditional medical model to care centered on the veterans and their functional and human needs. Veterans are admitted to nursing homes because they can no longer care for themselves or lack the social and economic resources to remain at home.

The transformation emphasizes a change from the institutional approach of meeting the basic needs of life such as bathing, dressing and eating, to a person-centered approach that allows the veterans the freedom and flexibility to recuperate, rehabilitate, or die with dignity.

The transformed environment includes nursing stations more like living rooms, eating spaces more like dining rooms and enhanced personal choice and well-being. Nursing home pets, as well as creative use of art, music and dance are encouraged.

One example at VAMC Nursing Home Care in Batavia, N.Y. the ward like corridors with institutional signage and sterile walls were transformed by engaged staff, residents, volunteers and families to create neighborhoods.

VA is not alone in recognizing the need to transform nursing home care. The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and major consumer and professional groups have similar goals. The transformational efforts of these groups has led to improved clinical outcomes and quality of life. In areas such as nutrition, hydration, reduced medication (including psychotropic), reduced falls and family satisfaction indicators have improved.

## Getting on Board with CONTAC

The Consumer Organization and Networking Technical Assistance Center (CONTAC) is based in Charleston, West Virginia. It is one of the Technical Assistance Center funded in 1998 with a Center for Mental health Services grant.

CONTAC is a resource center for consumers and consumer-run organizations across the United States. Available services and products include information materials; on-site training and skill-building curricula; electronic and other communication capabilities; networking and customized activities promoting self-help, recovery, leadership, business management, and empowerment.

Various components of organizational technical assistance are conducted by CONTAC, including (1) communication and networking; (2) training and skill building; and (3) sharing lessons learned. Objectives

include fostering self-help, leadership and management skills, addressing unmet needs of local and diverse consumer organizations, strengthening relationships among stakeholders, supporting capacity building, and participating in national collaboration.

CONTACT utilizes continuous quality improvement methodology to effectively direct services to areas of greatest need. Representatives with expertise in areas of culture and ethnic diversity, peer-support services, programming, research, and evaluation help provide the CONTAC project with hands on guidance, resource identification and direction for networking, trainings and writings.

The VHA Mental Health Consumer Councils have identified training needs for councils in organizing their structure, leadership training, advocacy skills and need to navigate the VA system. CONTACT will

## Information and Resources

Justice for All  
NMHA Annual Conference Hyatt Regency Washington  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

NAMI-2005 Annual Convention  
June 18-21, 2005  
Austin, TX  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)